



WAFS check weather data before taking off. Tomorrow they will be in different corners of the continent

THE man at Gate 4 told me, "Sorry, sir. We've had to cancel your passage on this flight. There's a priority on your seat." I looked at him in dismay. "But I've got to get to Washington," I protested. "I've had this reservation for days."

"Sorry. There's nothing we can do."

Few things make you feel so helpless as to run head-on into the discovery that all your travel plans have been wrecked. I knew this was a war necessity and I was willing to take it with good grace. Yet, in my disappointment, I couldn't help asking, "Who's getting my seat?"

The man nodded toward someone behind me. "The lady, sir."

She was a girl in a trim gray uniform, wearing trousers instead of a skirt. On her coat were the silver wings of the Air Transport Command. A bulky, fur-lined coat — the kind you'd expect to be used in an open cockpit during a blizzard — hung over her arm. Her head was bent in the study of a timetable, but when she lifted her face, I saw that she was tired — desperately tired. She looked as if she hadn't slept in days.

"What outfit is that?" I asked the man.

Salute the WAFS . . . ladies who scorn danger and ignore weariness to ferry Uncle Sam's warplanes from one air base to another. Watch them operate

by Oscar Schisgall

"WAFS," he said. "Women's Auxiliary Ferrying Squadron." Perhaps to appease me for the loss of my seat, he added, "She's just delivered an Army plane. The sooner we can get her back to her base at New Castle, Delaware, the sooner she'll be able to deliver another one."

Watching her, I wondered at her weariness; wondered how many flights she'd made in the past few days. She couldn't have been more than 23 or 24, and she was quite small. It was astonishing — humbling, too — to think of a girl like that flying Army planes to points all over the country, alone in the skies hour after hour, flying through rain and sleet and snow and clouds.

I had an impulse to talk to her. But she went on through the gate and climbed into the big passenger plane. It was the last I saw of her, yet for weeks the memory of her tired face kept recurring. In the end it was one of the factors that sent me to the New Castle Army Air Base.

Public Relations in Washington had told me, "If you want information about the WAFS, the best person to talk to is the woman who organized the outfit, Director Nancy Harkness Love."

I had said in all innocence, "She must be quite a person."

At that the captain at Public Relations smiled. "Wait'll you see," he said.

Mud — gray mud stretching everywhere — was the first thing you noticed when you entered the main gate of the New Castle base. It had been raining for three days and it was still raining; the mud was inches deep.

Just ahead of me walked a girl. She carried a suitcase, a bag containing an Army parachute, a fur-lined coat and another bundle. Hunched against the rain, she looked as tired as the girl I'd seen at the airport.

"She just checking in?" I asked the officer who escorted me.

He nodded. "They always check in like that — lugging about 60 pounds of clothes and equipment. Those babies have really gone to war." There was real admiration in his voice.

Quarters

THE buildings around me were the same color as the mud. Most of them were wooden; a few were of stone. The girl turned off the road to follow a catwalk of planks. It led across mud to the steps of a wooden building.

"That's where the WAFS live," the soldier said. "Used to be officers' bachelor quarters. Now it's been converted for the girls."

"How many of them stay here?"

"All of 'em."

"You mean to say," I asked in bewilderment, "the entire organization of WAFS is housed in this one building?"

"Sure. Including Mrs. Love. There's only about twenty-five of 'em so far. But that's just a start — there'll be plenty more soon."

"Director of Women Pilots" is an impressive title. It makes you visualize an authoritative, military woman. You're surprised when you first meet Nancy Harkness Love — happily surprised.

You find her in a barren room whose three doors, leading to other offices, are wide open. People walk through at will. She sits behind a simple desk — the same kind of desk her stenographer uses. There are no push-buttons, no orderlies, no trimmings of any sort.

And she is amazingly young, still in her twenties. When she rises to shake your hand cordially, you feel at home right away. Here is a slim, tall and gracious girl with ash-blond hair. Within a few moments you realize that questions about the WAFS, even the elementary questions of a layman, never bore her. **She talks of her girls with pride and enthusiasm. And yet, in everything she says, there is a note of thoughtfulness, as if she never forgets even for a second the hard, grueling, often dangerous war job her girls are being called upon to do.**

"There's just one thing we ask," she says. "Don't present us as a glamor outfit. We're not. There's no room or time for glamor in the WAFS. We've got a serious job to do and we do it. If any girls come here with illusions of glamor, things like that mud and rain out there take it out of them quickly enough."

I mentioned my surprise in learning that



READY. Four lady pilots report at headquarters, all set to tackle their man-sized flying jobs



SOLO. The WAFS fly alone for long, cold hours. Here Barbara Towne prepares for an overnight hop



ACES. The squadron takes only the very best. Each girl has had at least 500 flying hours